

But it revived the old controversy, and the effect of this revival is seen in Major's denial of the absolute supremacy of the pope over the Church, and of his superiority to temporal rulers. The denial was by no means new. Nor was his denunciation of the abuse of excommunication, which could only be valid if based on adequate grounds, of pluralities and non-residence, of the corruption and degeneracy of prelates, priests, and monks, which disfigured the Church of his native land. These were the commonplaces of every earnest-minded cleric in Christendom in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, who left the record of his animadversions on the universal declension of the Church. Nor was Major alone, even among his own countrymen, in his strictures of rampant abuse. Henryson before him, Dunbar, and more especially, as we shall see, Sir David Lyndsay, his contemporaries, lifted up their voices against these and other evils. Major's testimony is, however, especially weighty as that of a famous doctor of theology, an influential teacher of youth, and not merely of a nondescript poet. His class-rooms at Glasgow and St Andrews attracted all the eager young spirits of his age. Men like Knox, Patrick Hamilton, and George Buchanan sat at his feet; and if his scholastic method did not fascinate the more alert among his pupils, his reputation as a doctor of the Sorbonne and a prolific writer made him a sort of scholastic dictator for the time being. "He was," says Knox, "a man whose word was reckoned a sort of oracle in matters of religion."

Major was, however, by no means a militant reformer. He was little, if at all, affected by the humanism of the rising generation which it was his office to teach. He was and remained a medievalist. As regards theological progress and intellectual freedom he appeared to men like Melancthon a mere fumbler in scholastic pedantry. "I have seen," says he in his *Defence of Martin Luther against the furious Decree of the Parisian Theologasters*, *a-propos* of the condemnation of Luther by the Sorbonne, "the commentaries on Peter Lombard by John Major, a man, I am told, now the prince of the Paris masters. What waggon loads of trifles! . . . If he is a specimen of the Paris doctors, no wonder they are little favourable to Luther." The doctor of the Sorbonne, who counted the Syndic Noel Beda among his patrons, was